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## \$31 M. Basquiat Poised to Become Most Expensive Western Work Auctioned in Asia

BY **ANGELICA VILLA**

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Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Warrior*, 1982  
CHRISTIE'S

Jean-Michel **Basquiat** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/basquiat/>), one of the most expensive contemporary artists, is set to continue his reign next month at Christie's in Hong Kong. His 1982 painting *Warrior* will be auctioned on March 23 during a single-lot sale titled "We Are All Warriors." The work, which carries a third-party guarantee, is expected to achieve a price between \$31 million and \$41 million (HKD 240 million–HKD 320 million). If the present lot meets its low estimate it will be among the top 10 Basquiats to ever sell at auction, surpassing the price of \$30.7 million paid for *Flesh and Spirit* (1982), from the collection of Herbert Neumann, at Sotheby's in 2018.

"It is simply a masterpiece," Cristian Albu, Christie's international director of postwar and contemporary art, said of *Warrior*.

The large-scale painting, made with acrylic, oilstick and spray paint on wood panel, features a sword-wielding figure with Basquiat's signature skull-like head. Its subject is brutality, and Basquiat had the threat of state violence in mind when he made it.

If it sells for within its estimate, *Warrior* will have increased dramatically in value. The current seller, a private American collector, purchased the work at Sotheby's London in 2012 for \$8.7 million, where it was estimate at \$7.8 million–\$10.9 million. Prior to its sale in 2012, the work—once held by the Mugar family—sold at Sotheby's London in 2007 for \$5.6 million and, before that, in 2005 for \$1.8 million.

First exhibited in 1983 in Tokyo at Akira Ikeda Gallery, the work eventually traveled to exhibitions in Paris, Vienna, and Milan in the coming decades. It was last showcased in 2019 in the inaugural exhibition of the Brant Foundation's New York space.

The sale looks to continue a market ascent for Basquiat that has been ongoing since 2013, when *Dustheads* (1982) sold at Christie's New York, bringing in \$48.8 million. Nine of the top 10 most expensive Basquiat works are from the same year *Warrior* was completed. "In '82, he was at the height of his artistic power," Albu said. "If you look at this it's like a self-portrait. He had no shame to express what he wanted to express."

While the current estimate is more than triple its last price realized nine years ago, Albu cites the 2017 sale of *La Hara* for \$30.7 million—which depicts a menacing image of police officer behind bars—as an indicator of the present work's potential value describing the two as having, "equal power and equal rawness."

Works made in the brief window between 1981-2, considered Basquiat's most valuable are become increasingly scarce, according to Albu. "Each year they become rarer and rarer," he said. "Most of them now are in museums or private foundations."

The Basquiat is also poised to be the most expensive work by a Western artist at an auction in Asia. If it performs as well as the house expects, it will outdo a record set in 2020 by a Gerhard Richter abstraction from the collection of financier Ronald Perelman. That work sold for \$28.8 million at Sotheby's Hong Kong in July. The push to sell such a work by a Western artist for such a tall price in Asia signals that Christie's is thinking globally.

The Hong Kong market has emerged unscathed from the pandemic's economic grip, and fall sales in the city impressed. (By contrast, the New York auctions continued to lag.) At its Hong Kong headquarters, Christie's went on to achieve the highest sale total for an auction house in Asia, notching 17 records for contemporary artists in its Hong Kong-to-New York December 2 sale.

Continuing that global relay-style format, the Basquiat sale will be followed on March 23 by a 20th century art evening sale and an "Art of the Surreal" evening sale, both of them in London. Also set to be auctioned that day are works by Alexander Calder, Joan Miró, and Rene Magritte.

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